

Testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly's Judiciary Committee

In support of Senate Bill No. 1019

3/10/2021

Co-Chairs Sen. Winfield & Rep. Stafstrom; Ranking Members Sen. Kissel & Rep. Fishbein; and esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee, I am writing in support of S.B. No. 1019 AN ACT CONCERNING THE BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES, ERASURE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS FOR CERTAIN MISDEMEANOR AND FELONY OFFENSES, PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON ERASED CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORD INFORMATION AND CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION WITH RESPECT TO MISDEMEANOR SENTENCES.

My name is Melinda Tuhus and I am a resident of Hamden. I support S.B. 1019 for the automatic erasure of criminal records. I am working with a young friend now who was released from federal prison last fall and hasn't been able to re-start his life yet. Mass incarceration has had real, ongoing consequences in Connecticut, hurting Black and brown communities in our state, and burdening hundreds of thousands of Connecticut residents with a criminal record. Records present barriers to employment, housing, occupational licensing, and higher education. 9 in 10 employers, 4 in 5 landlords, and 3 in 4 colleges use background checks. Clean Slate will automatically expunge the records of people who have served their time, returned to our communities, and remained crime-free. A criminal record should not be a lifetime sentence.

Clean Slate makes communities safer. When people have access to jobs, housing, occupational licensing, and higher education, they are more likely to earn higher wages, and less likely to recidivate. A study from the University of Michigan Law School found that recidivism rates for people who have had their records expunged are so low that they actually "pose a lower crime risk than the general population as a whole."

With S.B. 1019, Connecticut can strengthen our economy, improve public safety, and advance racial justice. I encourage all members of the Judiciary Committee, on both sides of the aisle, to support this important measure. And I would encourage you to drastically reduce the time before they can be eligible for automatic erasure. It's the period of time as soon as they are released from custody that is the most critical to enabling them to get a job, housing, go back to school, etc. Thank you.

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